

# Can a Medieval Fayre be accessible?

Transcript

## Introduction

**William Luu:** Ever since starting my current role at an unnamed government agency, I've taken quite an interest to accessibility. I also consider myself someone interested in nerdy stuff.

I like my cool weapons. I like my history. I know the difference between the Saurons and Sarumen. So, when I saw that there was a Medieval Fayre near where I lived, I thought, why not?

Then I thought maybe I could combine my two interests. (*Sarcastically*) Ain't I clever?

Can a Medieval Fayre be accessible?

Or better put: Can an experience that is intentionally loud, rustic, and crowded be accessible?

[Can That Be Accessible? intro video]

## What is accessibility?

**William Luu:** Before we dive deeper, I think it's best to talk about what it means to be accessible.

Accessibility is as broad as disability, and disability is very broad. Some people with disability have no access needs. Others have a few. Even some people with the same disability can have different access needs.

Accessibility means removing barriers in society, and trust me, there are a lot of barriers.

Accessibility is more than wheelchair ramps or accessible parking—not that those aren't important, but accessibility is thinking broadly for a wide range of needs that real people have.

Accessibility means proper planning, and when you plan something right, it will be accessible. So, in theory, a Medieval Fayre can be accessible.

## I went to a Medieval Fayre

**William Luu:** I went to the Blacktown City Medieval Fayre in Nurragingy Park on 16 May. It was a good time. I had fun. It cost \$10 to enter and I certainly think I got my value. I think I'll go back again next year.

Blacktown City Council ran the event, and this is important because the council has a disability inclusion action plan. It's a bit out of date, but action 2.15 reads:

Develop and implement and events and festivals disability Inclusion checklist for Council-run events.

So, what considerations did they make?

Well, the good news is the accessibility info was on their website. However, you can write anything on a website. What really matters were what accessibility features were present on the day.

## A long queue

**William Luu:** So, the day started with a long queue.

I wanted to be clever, so I took the Rooty Hill entrance rather than the Doonside entrance, which I thought would be more packed. As it turns out, the Rooty Hill entrance was also jam packed. On the other hand, I got to see a miniature train, which I rode on earlier this year.

If you had a disability that makes lining up for 20 minutes untenable, then there should be an alternative. Maybe a ticketing system.

There were some Blacktown City Council staff walking along the queue, but they were there to let you know that the queue was for pre-paid ticket holders.

If you wanted to buy the ticket on the day, you had to:

1. walk all the way to the front,
2. Purchase your ticket, and then
3. Walk all the way to the back to join the line.

It would have been good to have a few more signage around. This would reduce confusion and unnecessary movement.

Yes, accessibility starts before you enter the Fayre.

## **In the Fayre**

**William Luu:** Now I'm in the Fayre. It's crowded. There's not a lot of places to sit, and I think this can be a genuine issue for people with mobility needs.

I'm Autistic. What a surprise. I don't really like being in large crowds, so it was a bit stressful to look for my friend who went via the Doonside entrance. Try spotting someone you know in such a large crowd.

However, we survived and we went on with our day.

I want to talk about three things that caught my attention:

### **1. Pathing**

Nurragingy Park has quite a few well-marked and well-maintained pathing. I genuinely think these are usable by wheelchair users, noting that I'm not a wheelchair user. However, there weren't any mats or clear pathing to the market stalls which were on grass. I can see a wheelchair user definitely having a harder time accessing the market stalls.

This is something that was warned ahead of time on the website. However, I can't help but think this looks a bit more like mitigation rather than active accessibility planning.

Here's a bit of a tangent. Last year, the Medieval Fayre was cancelled because of mankind's final boss: Bad weather. This year, it rained a little bit earlier that week. While this was immersive in that you get to feel like a knight trudging your way through fields of mud at the Battle of Hastings, it certainly was not enjoyable.

I was wearing sneakers on the day, so it wasn't too much of an issue. I can definitely see someone in heavy armour, or someone with vision impairment, or even just someone navigating uneven ground, having some difficulties.

Some more consideration is required.

### **2. Accessible viewing area**

Was there a dedicated, accessible viewing area for the jousting? Yes, and I could confirm it because I walked past it, and I could see plenty of people with disability in there. That's a good thing, and that's good event planning.

The only thing I'm curious about was if the accessible viewing area was in place during other events during the day, and not just the jousting.

This is one of the better examples of accessibility planning for the event.

People with disability didn't have to navigate large crowds or steep incline to watch a show. And I'll tell you what, it was a mighty good show.

### **3. Noise**

I think the event planners did quite a good job with noise management. On the website, they noted that there would be explosives and loud cannons on the day.

Crowds can be loud, so there was a sensory space a bit away from the main events. Even better, this was by the Blacktown City Library van with its assortments of books.

During one part of the main show, re-enactors fired a cannon and I tell you what, it was bloody loud. Luckily, the MC warned people at the start of the segment that cannons would be used. This gave people ample warning to get away.

I can definitely see the loud noise startling the unprepared as well as the assistance animals. And speaking of assistance animals, some people brought their pets— i.e. non-assistance animals.

One of the segments was a live bird show which featured some birds of prey. Before the show started, the host did warn people with pets to keep them leashed and to keep them nearby, especially for pets that look a bit like prey.

I think it's really good that they thought about the many facets of animal welfare.

Overall, I think this shows a sensible level of accessibility planning for people with sensory needs, especially in a high noise environment.

### **Limitations**

Now, I'll preface late into this video: I'm not an Auslan user. I'm not a wheelchair user. I don't have an assistance animal.

I'm neurodivergent, but as the saying goes: "If you've met one Autistic person, you've met one Autistic person." I can definitely see someone else

who's Autistic taking more issue with the loud noises.

This is not a formal accessibility audit done by someone in a suit—not that I didn't wear blazer on the day. This is an exploration of whether an event was well planned.

## **Discussion**

With all that in mind, I can say, again as someone without high accessibility needs, that the Medieval Fayre was broadly accessible from what I saw. People with disability could access the Fayre and enjoy it.

Was it on the same level as someone without high access needs? I hope so. I think people certainly enjoyed the jousting.

It was a Medieval Fayre. It was loud. It was crowded. It was muddy, but it was reasonably accessible. Why? Because it was well planned.

However, there are still some barriers I did not mention.

I can definitely see a person with disability having a hard time navigating the large crowd. There's no easy fix for this other than some better crowd planning before the event started.

While in the queue, I eavesdropped someone who suspected that people from outside the Blacktown local government area were coming to this event.

As a bit of a comparison, I have footage of Nurragingy Park on a normal Sunday and Nurragingy Park as a Medieval Fayre.

**[Footage shows Nurragingy Park considerably less packed on a “normal Sunday”]**

One notable gap was Auslan. There weren't any Auslan interpreters at the Medieval Fayre. This was something that was noted on the website, and I can confirm I did not see any Auslan interpreters on the day.

This is a shortcoming. While Deaf people could still enjoy the visual spectacle, they would not be able to hear the MC's commentary, and I tell you what the commentary was worth hearing.

**Jousting Announcer:** Here we go!

**[Crowd cheers]**

**[The knights on horseback charge at each other]**

**Jousting Announcer:** Oh! So there will be no points. No points awarded there. So even though the lance snapped, it's what we call a "barricade" when the lance actually went in front of the rider and broke. It doesn't score any points, unfortunately.

**William Luu:** So in that respect, a Deaf person might not be able to enjoy the Medieval Fayre as much as others.

## **Conclusion**

**William Luu:** Can a Medieval Fayre be accessible? Yes.

Was Blacktown City Medieval Fayre accessible? Yes, with caveats.

It was a good event. I enjoyed it. From what I saw, Blacktown City Council proactively took steps to remove barriers. And these are barriers that impact participation and enjoyment for people with disability.

Genuinely I'm impressed, that an event, while being a bit of anachronistic stew, can be immersive, can be loud, can be crowded, and still be accessible.

The Medieval Fayre happens every year, unless there's bad weather. So, if it's up your alley, I really think you should go. Blacktown City Council noted several accessibility features on the website, and those features were there on the day.

This really shows that when you plan something right, it can be accessible, even if it is a Medieval Fayre.

And even for a warlock, drinking a can of Coke, while the mage assistant who is a wheelchair user waits patiently to see the jousting.

**[*Can That Be Accessible?* Outro video]**